



Legislative Update



*Preview of Issues and Topics in the 2021
Legislative Session*

Ron Shultz, WSCC Policy Director
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2021 LEGISLATIVE SESSION PREVIEW

The upcoming legislative session will be unprecedented in how it will be conducted in light of the Coronavirus Pandemic.

The session will also be significant in that they will be developing the 2021-23 biennial operating and capital budgets.

2021 LEGISLATIVE SESSION PREVIEW

Although the official legislative calendar has not been released, it's anticipated the 2021 Legislative session will start on Monday, January 11, 2021.

This will be a long, 105 day session, ending Sunday, April 25.

2021 LEGISLATIVE SESSION PREVIEW

Legislative Election Results

- Election essentially maintained the status quo.
- Some changes that may impact our issues in the next legislative session.

2021 LEGISLATIVE SESSION PREVIEW

Legislative Election Results

- The Senate retain the current 28-21 Democratic majority.
- Key changes:
 - Loss of incumbent Senator Dean Takko (D) from the Cowlitz/Pacific area.
 - Addition of Twina Nobles from the 28th legislative district (Lakewood area) who defeated an incumbent Republican.

2021 LEGISLATIVE SESSION PREVIEW

Legislative Election Results

- The House will be split 57-41 with Democrats in the majority.
- Key Changes:
 - Brian Blake (D) lost his race in the 18th legislative district (Cowlitz/Pacific counties).
 - Zach Hudgins (D) lost his race in the 11th legislative district.

2021 LEGISLATIVE SESSION PREVIEW

Pandemic Impact on Legislature

- The coronavirus pandemic will force dramatic changes in how the Legislature will operate next session.
- Changes will impact the ability of Commission staff to engage with legislators, and
- Will require conservation districts to rethink and refocus how they will engage with their legislators.

2021 LEGISLATIVE SESSION PREVIEW

Pandemic Impact on Legislature

- The Legislative Building will be closed to the public during session.
- Each chamber will have a minimum number of members to open and close the daily session.
- Committee meetings will be conducted remotely via Zoom and broadcast on TVW.
- This will allow people from across the state to tune in and watch the committee hearings.
- Conservation districts able to testify on legislation remotely, rather than having to travel to Olympia to testify in person.

2021 LEGISLATIVE SESSION PREVIEW

Possible Legislative Topics:

- Legislative leaders have signaled they will be focusing on four key topics this session:
 - budget, Covid response, equity, policing, and climate.
- Leaders are encouraging legislators to submit fewer bills this session because of the difficulty in working the process with the Covid limitations.
- It's not clear at this time whether this request will be followed or how it will impact our issues this session.

2021 LEGISLATIVE SESSION PREVIEW

Possible Legislative Topics:

Budget:

- Obviously isn't a "possible" topic but a "definite" topic.
- Not clear the scope and scale of the budget reductions, if any.
- Earlier this year, revenue projections indicated an \$8 billion shortfall over the next three fiscal years.
- Since that time actual revenues have come in stronger than expected.

2021 LEGISLATIVE SESSION PREVIEW

Possible Legislative Topics:

Budget:

- The mid-summer revenue forecast changed their projection to a \$4 billion shortfall due to strong revenues.
- The most recent actual revenue collections report on November 17 indicated an increase of \$380 million increase over projections for the period September 11 to November 10, an 11.5% increase.

2021 LEGISLATIVE SESSION PREVIEW

Possible Legislative Topics:

Budget:

- The unknown factors in the revenue picture is the impact of the most recent Covid restriction issued by the Governor.
- It also remains to be seen whether Congress will pass another Covid relief package or an economic stimulus package.

2021 LEGISLATIVE SESSION PREVIEW

Possible Legislative Topics:

Budget:

- Recent presentation to H Approp Committee:
 - At maintenance level only (no policy changes)
 - Ending balance shortfall of -\$738m in 2021-23
 - Total GF budget is \$55.929b for biennium.

2021 LEGISLATIVE SESSION PREVIEW

Possible Legislative Topics:

SCC Request:

- Amending state Public Records Act to make exempt from disclosure certain voter information provided when requesting a ballot for CD election.
- Information usually cell phone numbers and email addresses.

2021 LEGISLATIVE SESSION PREVIEW

Possible Legislative Topics:

Accountability:

- Continues to be legislative interest in accountability and transparency of special purpose district operations, including conservation districts.
- Unclear the exact nature of any legislation, likely the House may move the bill they passed last year that failed in the Senate.

2021 LEGISLATIVE SESSION PREVIEW

Possible Legislative Topics:

Net Ecological Gain:

- Topic of several bills last session.
- Net Ecological Gain (NEG) is the concept of going beyond current environmental law requirements to avoid and mitigate impacts to require ecological gain when there are on-the-ground activities impacting natural resources.

2021 LEGISLATIVE SESSION PREVIEW

Possible Legislative Topics:

Net Ecological Gain:

- Although legislation incorporating NEG into the growth management act and the Voluntary Stewardship Program did not pass.
- Ongoing discussions among stakeholders to see where NEG can be incorporated into state actions.
- Focus now seems to be around state funded projects, particularly transportation projects.

2021 LEGISLATIVE SESSION PREVIEW

Possible Legislative Topics:

Open Public Meetings Act:

- When the pandemic closures were announced they impact the ability of agencies to conduct open public meetings as required by law.
- Action by the Governor was required to allow agencies to conduct meetings remotely.
- There's interest among several state agencies and local governments to have legislation to change the Open Public Meetings Act to allow for remote meetings under certain circumstances.

2021 LEGISLATIVE SESSION PREVIEW

Possible Legislative Topics:

Water Banking:

- Stakeholders working with their local legislators on a bill to establish a water banking program in several watersheds largely in Okanogan county.
- The idea is to have a state program with funding to purchase water rights from willing landowners and “bank” those rights so the landowner can continue to use the water, but cannot sell the water right to someone who wants to move the water out-of-basin.

2021 LEGISLATIVE SESSION PREVIEW

Possible Legislative Topics:

Equity:

- There may be legislation relating to state agencies and policies for equity and transparency in operations and funding allocation.
- No specific bills yet, but this topic is frequently mentioned as a top issue of concern by legislative leaders and members.

2021 LEGISLATIVE SESSION PREVIEW

What's Next:

WSSCC staff will continue the legislative team approach during session.

WSSCC staff will also coordinate with WACD.



Thank you!

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Washington State
Conservation Commission